

Preparing for Postsecondary Education & Employment: Individual Education Plan (IEP) vs 504 Plan

FAQs for IEP Teams

This guide is designed to assist IEP teams in determining appropriate actions for individual students to help prepare them for success in post-secondary educational and employment settings.

The transition from high school to higher education for students with disabilities (SWD) requires navigating the accommodation system at individual institutions as well as a general understanding of how federal laws apply to them. High school IEP teams should play a role in preparing students to request accommodations in post-secondary settings.

[Comparison of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)

What is a Local Education Agency's (LEA) obligation to provide services for a student who is found eligible for special education services under the IDEA?

According to special education Rule I.A.1. An LEA is required to ensure that all students (ages 3-21) who have not graduated from high school with a regular diploma, have available to them a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services as specified on the IEP.

The primary purpose of the IDEA which includes the transition services mandates, is to prepare students for further education, employment, and independent living. Students need a wide range of skills, knowledge, and services to be prepared and become successful in post-secondary settings. If students are eligible for special education services, it is appropriate to keep the IEP in place until the student exits school. IEPs for students approaching exit from school should be specifically designed to support transition to adulthood and success with the student's postsecondary goals.

Should a student who is still eligible for an IEP transition to a 504 plan, prior to leaving high school?

Both IEP and 504 teams are required to determine services and accommodations based on a student's current individual needs. There is nothing in IDEA or 504 regulation which permits an

LEA to make educational decisions based on available supports or resources provided or offered by higher education.

There is a misconception that since Section 504 covers both K-12 schools and institutes of higher education (IHEs) (e.g., colleges, technical schools, universities), that IHEs must follow high school 504 plans. IHEs do have to review information regarding a student's disabilities and provide eligible students with accommodations, but this is not because the students had 504 plans. 504 plans and IEPs are discontinued after students graduate from high school. The IHE develops an accommodation plan based on the IHE program and the individual student needs related to the disability.

One cause for confusion may be that some IHEs accept students' 504 plans or IEPs as documentation (meaning proof) of their disability and may grant students the accommodations they received in high school. This can lead to an understandable misconception that IHEs are following students' 504 plans, when in reality they are using the information and data from the previous 504 plan to develop a plan that correlates to the IHE program.

IHEs may provide the accommodations that students received in high school because the students are eligible, and the accommodations are considered appropriate in higher education settings.

Does a student's IEP or 504 plan transfer to the college/technical school/university setting?

A student's IEP or 504 plan does not automatically transfer to the IHE setting. However, the information regarding disability eligibility and accommodations on a student's IEP or 504 plan may be used by the IHE to determine eligibility for an individual student.

While an IEP or 504 plan may be helpful to identify what, if any, accommodations can be provided, many institutions will require additional data such as an up-to-date evaluation.

Is a student's IEP or 504 plan enough documentation to receive accommodations in college?

Each Institution has its own policies regarding what is needed for documentation of a student's disability. According to the [Office for Civil Rights](#), some institutions may require more documentation than others.

Individual IHEs determine their own disability services documentation requirements within the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. For more on this guidance visit the [Association on Higher Education and Disability \(AHEAD\) webpage](#).

It is important for the student to become familiar with the requirements for requesting accommodations at the institution they are interested in attending.

How does a student receive accommodations in Institutes of Higher Education?

A student must initiate the request to receive accommodations in IHEs by first contacting the disability services office (DSO) at the institution they want to attend. A student must also be prepared to articulate how their disability impacts their learning and justify the need for reasonable accommodations.

It is important to note that an IHE cannot legally approach the student to disclose their disability status. The student must disclose their disability status if seeking accommodations.

The student will need to bring documentation of their disability to the meeting with the disability services counselor. This could include the most recent testing, high school IEP or 504 documents, or medical information.

The disability services counselor will conduct an intake interview, examine the data and decide the need for accommodations or if more information or testing is needed.

A student should also prepare for the meeting by researching the IHEs in which they are interested and the process of applying for accommodations through the DSO. Note that IHEs may have different names for their DSO's, such as Disability Resource Center, Student Support, etc.

A student may want to ask their teachers, school counselors and/or family to help them prepare for the process of applying for accommodations in IHEs while they are still in high school.

These resources provide more information about preparing to request accommodations in college:

[College planning for students with disabilities](#)

[Higher Education for Students with Disabilities](#)

How can I best prepare a student with a disability to be successful in Institutes of Higher Education?

It's very important that SWD can advocate for themselves in an IHE setting. Students should understand and be able to articulate their disability and how it impacts their learning. Students should know what accommodations they had in high school and what they may need in their college classes. A good way to have students practice this skill is to have them lead their own IEP meetings beginning with their transition plan.

SWD should also understand their strengths, interests, preferences, needs and how those relate to their future goals for further education and employment. Paid employment is one of the strongest predictors of post school success for SWD, so supporting students in employment should be a priority.

Often SWD need additional support preparing for success in IHEs. Assisting students with researching college programs, admissions requirements, entrance exams, accessibility laws, and contacting the disability services at their college of interest prior to attendance are important activities to setting students up for success.

For more information on how to help prepare SWD for success in IHEs the following resources are available:

[Students with disabilities for postsecondary education](#)

[Transition Timelines for Students in Grades 9-12 Transitioning from High School to College Parent\(s\)/Guardian\(s\) & Student Sample Checklist for Preparing Student with a Disability for Post-secondary Education/Vocational Training.](#)

What does the law say about receiving accommodations in higher education?

Title II and III of the ADA require both public and private colleges and universities to provide equal access and accessibility to SWD. Colleges and universities that receive federal funding are required under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to make their programs accessible to students with disabilities. [Public Law 110-325](#)

IHEs must provide academic adjustments and auxiliary aids and services to students with a qualifying disability. Examples of these types of accommodations and services may be arranging for priority registration; reducing a course load; substituting one course for another; providing note takers, recording devices, sign language interpreters, and extended time for testing.